THE GAY CHRISTIAN

A journal of theological reflection from Metropolitan Community Church

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MAY 1976

PASSION and the church

by CARTER HEYWARD

An address delivered at a National Gay Task Force forum on Gays and the Religious Community in March in New York.

I'VE DONE A lot of thinking about what it is I want to say. I've thought about feminism, homosexuality, lesbianism; about helping build a foundation for "Theology of sexuality"; about levelling an indictment against the Church and the Judaic tradition, in which the Church is rooted, for what is at best gross irresponsibility in dominant ecclesiastical attitudes toward sexuality, sex, and homosexuuality. I've attemted to sift through my own reflections in order to focus on, and share with you, that which is for me most basic to a discusssion of "feminism, homosexuality, and the church" (the topic suggested to me).

I want to speak of *passion*, and of how passion is, historically, so terribly feared, yearned for, hated, and admired by the ecclesiastical authority of the Church. The Church, which has over the years come to manifest itself as a passionless institution – a body without depth; without intensity of experience, involvement, relationship, life, and death; an institution without passion. The Church, that which has traditionally fed itself on fear of passion; that which has consistently and predictably disclaimed its own hidden passion; that which has located and sought out its own passion elsewhere, and denounced "queers" with passion, making us scapegoats; virtually the bearers of the passion of the Church. This has been especially true, in recent years as well as long ago, of feminist women and of self-acknowledged, self-celebrating homosexuals; those who are "gay and proud."

Passion is deep-quality living – like diving in and swimming instead of wading. Passion is in or out of bed. It's in homosexuals, heterosexuals, and bisexuals. It's in celibates and genitally active women and men.

That we who are female and/or gay have come to symbolize passion is in its own way a tribute to us. It is, in fact, a tribute that many of us do not merit, for there are of course many women (gay and straight) and many gay men who are not passionate people. But in the mind of the Church – Roman Catholic, Protestant, Episcopal – we are viewed as the archetypal carrier of passion. We are seen collectively as the character for whom Equus is God and lover: The boy who relates orgiastically – with sweat, panting, screams, and semen – to the created world around him. We are blown up into child-devouring monster proportions: She/He who lives to lure, seduce, destroy whatever is pure, hence good.

And all around us, those who fear passion in themselves project it onto us – us women and gays, who in many cases also fear the one, or ones, on whom its passion has been projected. The Church has, historically, projected its passion onto *women* and homosexuals – equating passion with sex, and "broads" and passion in ourselves and have nowhere to project it; so we swallow it; and like all fear that is swallowed whole, it contributes to our psychological indigestion, which for women has been classically labeled "neurotic depression" and for gays "inversion." And people gawk at us and name us names not of our choosing – names like "chick" and "doll" and "broad" and "fag" and "femme" and "butch" and "queer." They name us names for so long that we begin to answer when we are called, to jump when the finger snaps, believing these names to be our own.

We women and gays have become a terrifying "other,"a passionate "not me" to many practicing heterosexual men and women; to many self-denying, self-denigrating gay people who cannot celebrate themselves because they have learned well to despise themselves; to many people writhing in the tension between active genitals and celibates psyches; and conversely to people caught in conflict between celibate genitals and sexually active psyches.

The Passion of Jesus – a term that has traditionally marked the period of time between, and including, the Last Supper and the Crucifixion, was exactly that: A time during which Jesus bore the passion of his time, his culture, his religious heritage: Jesus, one through whose passion his friends began to recognize their own; Jesus, for whom being human involved immersion in choices of

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real life and real death; Jesus, the passionate – lover of brothers and sisters, man of many moods, person for whom all relationships was a challenge, hence a threat, to those around him who were willing to settle for less than passion. less than living life and dying death (and the two do and must go together), less than being full, abundant, electric with contemplative and relational energy, less than becoming impassioned about matters of justice and dignity. Jesus, the compelling and terrifying Christ, to whom people are often drawn and from whom we simultaneously step back. Because our guts assure us that people of passion are people who are, in the words of my dad, "just askin' for a lickin'!" Passion is hard to take, and so passionate people get clobbered. Like Jesus.

Taking cues from the culture that crucified Jesus, the Church

ALL AROUND US, THOSE WHO FEAR PASSION IN THEMSELVES PROJECT IT ONTO US -- US WOMEN AND GAYS, WHO IN MANY CASES ALSO FEAR PASSION IN OURSELVES AND HAVE NOWHERE TO PROJECT IT; SO WE SWALLOW IT . . .

cultivates passionless people – more accurately, people who must deny their passion – their full capacities for life and death – in order to be acceptable as priests, ministers, mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, people, period – in the Church and in the rest of society. The Church has hailed the dispassionate Logos, Word of the Patriarchal Lord governing His earthly Manor, whose sterile and often rather pallid Son was born painlessly by an untouched Virgin, as that which is divine. That which is not-God – not the One in whose we are created; that which is, for Christians, "not-me" – has been branded as Satanic, demonic, evil, – passionate. You may recall that early Church Fathers believed that evil, woman, and sex were virtually the same passionate phenomenon. In other words, "evil," "woman," "sex," and "passion" were different names for the same

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experience – the same demon – against which holy men believed they had to contend for the sake of an antiseptic God, in whose pure image they were said to be and whose Fatherly work they strove to do – namely, the indictment and salvation of passionate souls. Our sophistication notwithstanding, things are today not all that different.

What does this mean for us, now, in the Church? It means, I believe, that the ordination of women and homosexuals; the ERA. equal pay, equal employment opportunity, and equal rights for homosexuals and women – within and without the Church – are worthy goals. It also means that, while these goals for basic rights are good ones, it is imperative that those of us involved in these struggles keep clearly in mind that the attainment of such goals (in small and large ways; in the short- and long-run) is, in itself, not enough. Ordaining women is not enough. Blessing gay relationships is not enough. Open housing for homosexuals and qual employment for women are, in themselves, not enough. For women priests and gay relationships have been; every bit as devoid of depth, humor, pain, joy, fullness of life and fullness of death. We want more than this.

What we in the Church must be about, I am convinced, is a return to religion of passion – a way of being in which anything less than spilling-over with the Spirit of God is not enough; spilling over with tender toughness in our daily work and play, with righteous and active indignation at injustice, with careful caring for others and self, with courage to

. . . JESUS, FOR WHOM BEING HUMAN INVOLVED IMMERSION IN CHOICES OF REAL LIFE AND REAL DEATH

stand up and be counted – when it counts; spilling over with integrity in relationship, with awareness and spirit that we really can't understand. As Chris Williamson shares her passion, "Filling up and spilling over" – with the passion of Jesus. Religion of passion. This is where we are going, I hope, and I believe –within or without the religious institutitions we have known.

I bring this to a close on a rather personal note. A fair number of my ecclesiastical brothers "accuse" me of being a "radical feminist," a "lesbian," a "witch," an "anarchist," and sometimes a "revolutionary." These angry brothers do not realize what compliments they pay me! They do not realize (nor do they care to realize) to what a long, strong line of passionate women they allude when they toss

WHAT WE IN THE CHURCH MUST BE ABOUT, I AM CONVINCED, IS A RETURN TO RELIGION OF PASSION — A WAY OF BEING IN WHICH ANYTHING LESS THAN SPILLING-OVER WITH THE SPIRIT OF GOD IS NOT ENOUGH . . .

these epithets at my sisters and me. They do not know (nor do they care to know) the strength and sensitivity of women who have cared more about honesty than seduction, and who have known that love without justice is no love at all. Those who curse at us do not see (nor do they open their eyes to see) the creative caring of women who have loved themselves not as shadowed, half-relfections of so-called "male egos" but as a human being created in the image of God of POWER, of WHOLENESS, and of PASSION — HOLY God. The men who fear us have not felt (nor have they dared to feel) the wise caring of women who love women and men not as sex objects, but as sister and brothers sojourners along a common way.

No, those who call me names, thinking they do me harm, do not

know of whom, or to whom, they really speak. They do not know me, and they shall not know me so cheaply. They do not know Mary, the mother of Jesus, woman of strong will, who stood in defiance of Jewish custom, Mary the strong mother of Jesus; they do not know Sappho, eloquent Sappo, who empowered those conceived and cultivated specifically to be powerless. They do not know Sojourner Truth, wise old Sojourner whose truth cut through the crap of the ecclesiastical and educational elitism that booed her, and issued forth in relationship between black and white, poor and rich, women and women – as sisters. My frightened brothers do not hear (nor do they try to hear) what Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas were saying to each other. They do not hear the passion. Of the Pankhursts, Virginia Woolf, Amelia Earhardt, Mother Jones, the One and the Many who have cooked the meals, sewn the gardens and the clothes; who have borne the children, contemplated in convents, worked in factories, fought in wars (alas); made love to sisters and to brothers in spirit and sometimes in body too; who have read and written and learned and taught and cared and paid and cried and held on and held up those around them – and then have had to stand there and listen to men tell them that they are unfit, too weak, or too emotional to be taken seriously this time.

Those who say these things to us and behind our backs may, one day, any day, today, open their eyes and see that we move on. We are sojourning. We are not held back. And when the frightened people see that this is so, they will either shrivel up and die on the spot, or they will journey with us, rejoicing so, into the unknown, further into conscousness – faith – whose soul in Passion. Blessed be Passion, the daughter and son of God.

FEEDBACK: letters & responses

Truisms of Androgyny

THE ARTICLE ON androgynous sexuality by Paul Barstow in the March '76 issue of *The Gay Christian* was of interest to me if only for the fact that I'm currently preparing an article on the same topic for another journal. I wanted to see whether Dr. Barstow had any new angle on the subject. He did not. The article is swollen with prosaic statements in the passive voice.

As an out-front gay person I have always harbored a sneaking suspicion about defenses of the so-called "bisexual" lifestyle clothed as defenses of a theoretical androgyny. Such arguments conjure up an image in the back of my mind of a professional person – a would-be gay tied down perhaps to a marriage he half believes in – who is working out on paper his problem of conscience. What bothers his conscience is that he could really be free to lead a wholly gay life for himself but is afraid to go the risk.

Dr. Barstow's article is an androgynous hybrid in itself. He writes as though he can't make up his mind whether he wants to compose a formal scholarly paper or an informal piece of speculative journalism. The result is a self-conscious compromise that attempts forcibly to join the two genres together. The author may feel he does not want to bore the reader with academic flapdoodle, but then what is The Gay Christian for if it does not act as a scholarly forum for MCC? So maybe he figures he'll give his writing the tone of an armchair interview and end up talking down to the reader. This approach is unnecessary. Howard Wells' perfectly good scholarly piece appears a few pages further on. There is no hint of embarassment in Wells' paper, no need to justify its academic tone.

Dr. Barstow's pompous chit-chat was annoying to me because I sincerely wanted to be interested in what he had to say, but found he was frustrating my interest at every turn. If he had stuck to the usual format of a scholarly paper this would not have happened.

First, there's the name-dropping without footnotes. On p. 18 he drops the names Marcuse and Brown. A reasonably intelligent reader will assume he means *Herbert* Marcuse for the former, but what about the latter? Most likely it's *Norman O.* Brown. But, who knows?

Yes,it might make the article seem a little more formal to include footnotes. But I for one am *interested* in exactly what sources are being drawn upon. Then the error is compounded on p. 19 when Dr. Barstow quotes a certain Marc Fasteau. I have never heard of Fasteau and would like to know where this quotation comes from. It intrigues me! Once again my interest is foiled. I could not even find Fasteau listed in the "partial bibliography" at the end of the article.

MCC very much needs a scholarly journal in which a real MCC theology can be developed through scholarly discussion and articulated for the "lay" membership and the straight churches at large. The world is watching us, and being the cynical kind of place it is, it is watching to see where we will trip up. In order to establish credibility and respect for our position as gay Christians, we have to see to it that our standard are high – not impossibly exalted, but at least demanding a generally accepted norm of scholarly parlance. Articles written for TGC should not expect our indulgence. They should toe the line in the same way that articles submitted to any other scholarly church journal should.

That said, I can now compliment Dr. Barstow on his taste in literature. The lines from Shelley I thoroughly appreciated. Many church people have no feel for good poetry: look at all those thousands of godawful tacky hymn lyrics they produced in the nineteenth century alone! For me the poetry almost makes up for the faults of this article as a whole. It pulls together a great many turisms that would certainly help to educate the sort of person who has never stopped to think seriously about androgyny before. But truisms are just not true enough.

Keith Brown
Hartford

By What Authority?

NANCY WILSON

THE QUESTION of authority is central to the Christian faith. It is a Biblical-theological-historical and practical dilemma for the Church. The issue of authority pervades and underlies all discussion of scripture, theology, ethics and church polity. It is central because it is one point at which theological and practical concerns converge. I am concerned with 1) How do we understand the concept of authority in the Christian sense; 2) What are sources of authority for the Church; 3) and how does this apply to MCC as a church?

The issue of authority is a prominent feature of Israel's history, as recorded in the Old Testament. Who is the God of Israel? What is the nature and purpose of this God and of this God's authority? Who speaks for God? What is the relationship of human authority to divine authority? These are still important and relevant questions for the Church today.

In the New Testament, one of the questions most often asked of Jesus (by establishment religious people) was "By what authority do you do these things?" Jesus challenged the religious authorities of his day, and reminded them of the source of true authority. The early Church (see particularly the book of Acts) was also confronted with the question of authority: "*By what power, or by what name do you do these things?*" It is Gamaliel, a very wise and respected Pharisee who gives the most articulate answer to proof of authority:

> "Men of Israel, be cautious in deciding what to do with these men. . . I tell you, leave them alone. For if this idea of theirs or its execution is of human origin, it will collapse, but if it is from God, you will never be able to put them down, and you risk finding yourselves at war with God."
>
> Acts 5:35,38-39

It is a shame that the Christian Church has never learned to follow that advice. Crusades and Inquisitions have marred the Church and filled it with hypocrisy about its understanding of its authority in relationship to a loving God.

St. Paul was often challenged about the authenticity of his apostleship, even from within the early Church; and concern about true and false prophets was an important factor.

I believe that it is also possible to look at the entire history of the Christian Church from the perspective of the question of authority. Certainly the development of a canon of scripture involved making decisions as to what writings were authoritative and what writings were not. The Reformation grew out of a theological debate over the authority of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church. The questioning of the Church's authority paralleled the questioning of the entire medieval feudal order.[1] As the Reformation grew as a movement, the authority of scripture was lifted up, as over against the authority of Church tradition and law. Almost every religious reformation has its roots in a questioning of accepted sources and symbols of authority.

What are the sources of authority for the Christian faith? Church law and tradition? Scripture? The individual conscience? The Spirit?

What gives us in MCC the authority to be and become the church? What gave Troy Perry the right, or authority to call into being a church with a special ministry to gay people? These are all questions we must take seriously.

Furthermore, we must recognize that we live in an age where respect for secular and religious authority has been severly eroded. The very word "authority" is distasteful to many people. Every institution and source of authority is being questioned and challenged and even threatened. We live in a secular age, where the authority of God is not assumed — where not even lip-service is paid to that idea. Many reject the *concept* of authority altogether. Intrinsic to this is the fact that authority is often equated with leadership, particularly institutional leadership; and, there is good reason for mistrust of political and religious leaders in our society.

A lot of these feelings come from misunderstanding about what authority is, where it comes from, how it functions, what its nature and purpose is. Although it is possible and sometimes necessary to reject a specific mode of authority, or a particular authority figure, it is not possible, in my opinion, to get rid of the concept. I believe that authority is a social, political, psychological and spiritual reality among human beings.

Before going any further, the word "authority" must be defined. Perhaps it is best to begin with the basic, literal, dictionary definitions: The root of the word "authority" is the Latin "auctor" which means "originator," "beginner," "creator." There are at least six basic definitions of "authority:"

1. The right to determine, adjudicate, or otherwise settle issues or disputes, the right to control, command or determine.
2. An accepted source of information, advice, etc.
3. Expert
4. Commanding influence
5. A warrant for action; justification
6. Testimony; witness

Basically, these are all secular interpretations of the word. Often, theologians and church bureacrats accept the purely secular definitions, and just apply those to the Church, assuming

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that God is the "originator" of that kind of authority. Robert Bryant, in *The Bible's Authority Today*, defines authority in terms of "Lordship" or "over-against-ness" -- God is the final power we come up against, who demands our obedience. God is our authority in the sense that "whatever one acknowledges as rightfully and worthily commanding one's obedience and loyalty" is true authority.[2]

In a sense, Bryant is right. However, I agree with John McKenzie (author of *Authority in the Church*), that the concept of authority has a very different and specific meaning in the context of our Christian faith.

The nature of authority in the Christian sense is dependent on the nature of our God. Our God is self-giving and self-revealing *love*. Therefore, in a very basic sense, Christian authority must be a function of that love.

Truly, God's ways are often *not* our ways. Secular understanding of authority is filled with all sorts of assumptions. There is the assumption that authority has a tendency to become absolute — absolutely powerful, and unconcerned with those in its charge. We have inherited, in our culture, a patriarchal understanding of authority (which the Church, unfortunately, has adopted) which divides those in authority from those under authority; which sees life in terms of dominance and submission, coercion and control. The problem is that, too often the Church has not seen Christian authority as a function of love among equals, but has sold out to the secular model of authority and power. McKenzie points out that:

> "One can conceive of two dangers to the unity and the integrity of the Church: anarchy and the secularization of power. Of the two, Jesus spoke very little about the dangers of anarchy; he spoke frequently and earnestly about the dangers of the secularization of power."[3]

We must always remember, says McKenzie, that Jesus Christ was, is and always will be the only Head of the Church; and Jesus Christ demonstrated to us a revolution in the concept of power and authority:

> "Let your bearing towards one another arise out of your life in Christ Jesus. For the divine nature was his from the first; yet he did not think to snatch at equality with God, but made himself nothing, assuming the nature of a slave. Bearing the human likeness, revealed in human shape, he humbled himself, and in obedience accepted even death — death on a cross. Therefore God raised him to the heights and bestowed on him the name above all names. . ."
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> Philippians 2:5-9

As Christians, we understand ourselves to be the Body of Christ. Says McKenzie, "The Church must be Christ and she (sic.) must know what Christ is."[4] Jesus Christ became for us the "diakonos" (more than "servant," it means "lackey," "menial," or "slave") of our salvation.[5] Power and authority, in a Christian sense, means the power to love, to sacrifice, to serve one another. Those in authority are commissioned as servants to the rest of the Church. And, furthermore, everyone who is in a position of authority in the Church is responsible to the *whole* Church, to the whole Body of Christ. It means colleagiality, not coercion or control.

Finally, according to McKenzie, "The ultimate authority (for the Church) is always the living, risen Christ, identified with the whole Church."[6] I would like to interject at this point that John McKenzie is a Jesuit scholar, and it becomes obvious that his very Biblical understanding of authority is very much at odds with the history of authority in the Roman Catholic Church. In a time when the authority of the Pope and the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church is being challenged, he has tried to provide a Biblical basis for change.

C. H. Dodd, in his book, *The Authority of the Bible*, says that, "The ultimate authority is truth itself".[7] The last dictionary definition of authority is "testimony," or "witness." For Christians, authority comes from our testimony or witness to the truth that sets us free — the truth of God's revelation to us in Jesus Christ. It is this revelation and the way of life it commends to us that is authoritative; and no earthly power can either enforce that, or take it away. It is the truth itself that must be compelling, and not our institutionalization of it. The way we (the universal Church) have structured, over-structured and institutionalized our doctrine, ethics, and church organization, one would think that *we* thought that the truth of the gospel is so unconvincing that we have to continually prop it up!

It is obvious to me that so few people really understand what it means to be the Church. At one of our recent District Conferences, one man started making an analogy between our national government and how we should govern ourselves. He had a hard time understanding the difference between a secular government and how we should govern ourselves as the Church of Jesus Christ. Many Church governments resemble medieval feudalism, or autocratic monarchies. But the Church should be even more democratic than any secular government. And there must be an underlying trust that we share the same God and the same mission.

One woman in our pre-membership class finally understood. She said, "All those years I thought *they* (the clergy and church hierarchy) were the Church and we were the people — often just spectators. But now see — *we* are the Church, all of us together."

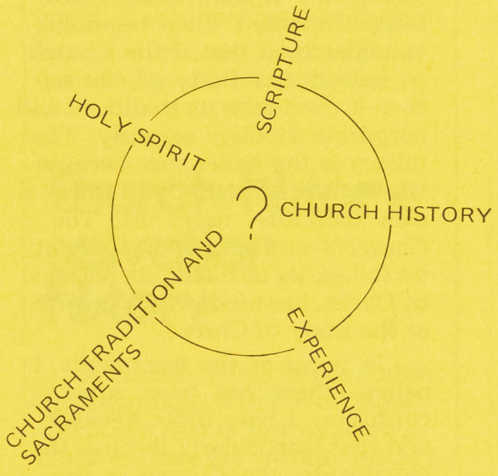
If we are truly to proclaim the gospel, we must begin to see authority as a function of the good news of God's love. In order to do that, we need to understand who God is, we need to trust each other, communicate, and be accountable to one another; and we need to become each others' servants.

Perhaps no question plagues fractured Christendom as much as "What is the source of our knowledge of God? Who or what is authoritative in terms of our understanding of God and the mission of the gospel?"

Our God is one God, but all of us who believe in God know that God can be experienced in a variety of ways. Some of those

ways are very personal and mysterious, and others are corporate and dynamic. The point is, there is not just one way of learning about, or knowing God, or feeling God's presence.

Some people rely on one method of knowing God, almost to the exclusion of others. One cry of the Reformation became "sola scriptura", or, "only through scripture can we know God." Many fundamentalist groups rely solely on scripture. The Roman Catholic Church at one time said that outside of the tradition and sacraments of the Catholic Church there is no salvation. The Quakers emphasize the "inner light" of God-consciousness; and Pentecostals emphasize the gift of the Holy Spirit. To an open-minded Christian, it might look like this:



Fine, you might say. Isn't it wonderful to have so many authoritative sources for our faith and way of life. It is fine, except that what does one do when two or more of these sources apparently conflict?

First, I would like to deal with each of these sources separately:

Scripture

Obviously, scripture is, and has always been one of the most important sources of our faith as Christians. That is why it is important for us to understand the nature and purpose and proper use of scripture. As gay Christians, we have all become painfully aware that proof-texting (quoting scripture out of context) can be the instrument of the Devil, and can be used as much in hate and ignorance as in love. Nevertheless, many persons, even in our churches, continue to use scripture in an uninformed way. And I mean *use* — because, unfortunately, people can quote scripture only to support their own unexamined prejudices, and will not let scripture speak to them. The temptation, when scripture is thrown at us, is to throw some back; but I feel that that can be ultimately self-defeating. What happens to us when we become like those who throw scripture at us (as if it were a sword or a brick, and not the instrument of God's love)? Rather than engage in that kind of game, should we not be a witness to the basic message of the gospel? What *is* necessary for us to do is to understand the basic, essential and profound truths of scripture, which can be overlooked when we just quote scripture out of context.

Some people see scripture in a semi-magical way. In fact, some people come close to worshipping scripture instead of God. A professor of mine used to call this "Bibliolatry." (I am finding that not all persons who label themselves "fundamentalists" feel this way.) Says C. F. Evans, "The desire for infallibility, short of the infallibility of God, be it of Church or Bible, is an idolatrous lust."[8]

I think it is important to clarify some basic issues. For the most part, I agree with C. H. Dodd when he says: "God is the Author not of the Bible, but of the life in which the authors of the Bible partake, and of which they tell in such imperfect human words as they command."[9] The mystery, says Dodd, is that Almighty God would use imperfect words and people to convey eternal truth. It is that same mystery that we celebrate in the incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus Christ. It is part of God's love for us, that God allows Him/Herself to be revealed at all — and that the Eternal can be revealed in human words and human beings does not undermine God's authority, but exposes it for what it is: a function of *love*.

I believe that scripture was inspired by God, and written by persons who loved God. However, I cannot believe that every word in scripture is equally inspired, nor that every word is literally true or worthy of acceptance. There are Psalms which ask God to trample our enemies; and that is not acceptable in terms of the gospel. Certainly, the authors of scripture did not intend to write, for instance, a scientific account of Creation — nor should we expect them to. Although we can learn from everything in scripture, not all parts are equally well written, or profound or inspired as other parts. The belief that every word of scripture must be *literally* true to contain truth is actually a 19th Century understanding of truth. That kind of *rigid* fundamentalism (or, unreconstructed fundamentalism, as I have heard it called), "is the product of an age which assumes that there is only one kind of truth, and only one vehicle of truth."[10]

When Old Testament or New Testament writers speak of homosexuality, for instance, they obviously did not always know what they were talking about. They did not experience the love of God that can be experienced in a deep, loving relationship between two gay persons. Obviously, in the minds of Biblical writers, all homosexuality was merely lust, and not love. Our experience, as gay people, has taught us differently.

One of my Biblical professors said, "truly, the Holy Spirit spoke through St. Paul. But sometimes the Holy Spirit stopped speaking and Paul kept writing."[11]

Certainly, scripture, and an understanding of the essential truth it contains, is a vital and irreplacable factor in our faith as Christians. However, unless we believe that revelation ceased as of the first Century, there are other sources of God's authority that

often function as correctives to the limitations and inadequacies of scripture. I remember, in college, sitting in on a discussion. One person piously pointed to the Bible and said, "It's *all* here, it's *all* here!" And another person quietly responded, "No, it's not all there, it's also in here," pointing to herself and to the gathered community.

The holy Spirit

Truthfully, not until I became involved in MCC did I have any idea of what the meaning of this "third person of the Trinity" was. It was never mentioned in my former church. I was not taught to be open to the movement of God's Spirit in my life: I had to learn that on my own, and, eventually, through MCC. The Holy Spirit is the same Spirit which moved in Creation, and which re-creates the image of God in each of us, and in us corporately as the Body of Christ. The problem (which is also a gift) is that the Spirit involves our feeling as well as our intellect, and feelings are often harder to define and analyze than words.

William Barclay, author of *The Promise of the Spirit*, describes God's Spirit in this way: "It is the Spirit who reveals God's truth to men (sic.), it is the Spirit who brings men into the presence of the truth; it is the Spirit who enables men to recognize the truth when they see it."[12] McKenzie says that, "In common thought and language authority means power. In the Church, the power of authority is identified with the Spirit."[13]

David McGuire, in Callahan's *God, Jesus and the Spirit*, deals extensively with the Holy Spirit and Church authority. He gives some information and insight into the early Church, and how, as the Church grew older, it relied less on the Spirit and more on Church structure and hierarchy. Whenever a church has been in conflict (as churches are, today, over many issues), one can sense the stirring of that Spirit again. And the Spirit always moves in the direction of the Kingdom vision. The Spirit is God's presence and power (the power of love) among us, revealing to us more of the truth. In the hymn, "Once to Every Man and Nation" there is a stanza that goes: New occasions teach new duties, Time makes ancient good uncouth; They must upward still and onward Who would keep abreast of truth. The Kingdom of God is yet to be fulfilled! There is work, and growing and change to be done, and that is the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit is God's creative power among us, it is the source of our visions and dreams, and of the strength to turn those dreams, into realities. McKenzie says that the Spirit is the "vital element in the authority of the Church." and that "the Spirit always speaks to the *whole* Church."[14] The Spirit is unpredictable — it does not only speak to church officials and clergy, but to any Christian who opens up to God's presence. The gift of the Spirit is the affirmation of the church's openness to God's presence and God's will.

The Spirit cuts through the secularization of power, and reaffirms the power of God's love among us. The Spirit is both an equalizer and an energizer for the Body of Christ.

Some churches have attempted to live by the Spirit alone, without taking seriously either scriptural foundations or the historical tradition and witness of the Church. This can result in anarchy, of the "everybody does their own thing" variety, and in corporate irresponsibility. But as McKenzie points out, the danger of this happening is less than the constant trend towards secularization of power and authority.

Church tradition. sacraments

This source of knowledge of God and God's authority is most clearly important to the Roman Catholic and Anglican communions. However, every church values its own tradition and understanding of the sacraments. Through my readings, and my interaction with Catholics and Anglicans, I am gaining a better understanding and appreciation of the extent to which Church tradition and canon law and the sacraments is authoritative for many Christians. I am beginning to understand that if the Church is, indeed, the Body of Christ, then it must take its traditions and corporate identity serously. The fallacy is the belief that because the Church is the Body of Christ it can, therefore, never err. The Church's unwillingness to admit its follies, its mistakes, its betrayal of Christ, has hindered its growth *as* the Body of Christ.

In terms of the sacraments, I believe there has been some confusion. I have often heard it said that, particularly through the sacraments, the Church is the mediator between God and the people. But scripture says that Jesus Christ is our only mediator, that the Church *is* the people, and that, through the sacraments we *become* the living Body of Christ on earth. Through the sacraments we are all reconciled to God, and God becomes present to us.

In any case, the sacraments (whether you recognize seven or two) are important. They are another very important way that we corporately experience God's presence and love for us. One thing I disliked about my church of origin (Methodist) was the extreme individualism of Holy Communion. One sat in the pew, ate the bread and drank the grape juice, and there was nothing

corporate about it, other than the fact that we were doing it simultaneously. I deeply appreciate and treasure the corporate way in which we communicate at communion in MCC. It is not possible for an individual *alone* to be transformed into the Body of Christ. It is our *sharing* that enables the transformation.

To Roman Catholics, the canon law of the Church is as authoritative as scripture. I suppose that as long as it is never absolutized, and if it is always understood that *grace* precedes law, I can appreciate human attempts to interpret the will of God. Obviously, the danger is that the formulation of law tends to degenerate into legalism, where law is not a means to an end, but becomes the end itself. When canon law supercedes both scripture and the movement of the Spirit, it can become a millstone around our necks, and impedes the coming of the Kingdom.

Church history. salvation history

A central theme of the Judeo-Christian faith is that God moves and is revealed in history. Just as much as there is a worldly history, there is a holy history (*Heilsgeschicte*) which moves through worldly history. We *can* learn from history, from the Church's history; and we can try to perceive where God has moved and is now moving in our corporate and individual lives. We can also take a critical view of Church history, and discover certain patterns which teach us about being human. One obvious pattern is the tendency of ideas and movements to become institutionalized, and to seek secualrization of power. This usually is accompanied by an increasing dependence on law, and less dependence on the Spirit. This is a very familiar pattern in Church history. The question remains: is it an inevitable pattern? Will, MCC for instance, eventually become like all other churches in terms of its institutionalization? Is it already becoming that way? Is institutionalization a necessity? Will there someday be a church that comes into being and challenges the oppressiveness of MCC? Can we be open enough to the Spirit so that we can change as history changes? Can we deal with and be open to visionaries and dissenters in our midst, so that the Spirit never abandons us? That is my hope.

And yet, if we know that the Church is not in any one church, perhaps we need not be so uptight about the survival of a particular church, as long as the Church, the Body of Christ, is alive and growing. I certainly think we need to be concerned about survival, but we must always ask, "survival for what?" I have heard people say that MCC is destined to bring the Church back to God. That always sounds a little smug to me. We are *not* the only "real" Christians in the world, nor are we the only true church. If God wishes to use us, and I pray that God will, that is wonderful. But we are still just *learning*, and we have so much work to do to build strong, self-consciously Christian local churches. Before we lead the rest of the Church back to God, we need to find out what that really means.

Particular churches, or individual Christians, can betray the gospel; but whenever that happens, the Church, the Body of Christ, always emerges, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to confront the institutional Church and redeem it. Thank God, no single church institution can contain or supress the Church universal, the Church triumphant. Wherever the gospel is preached and lived, there is the Church; and history teaches us that.

Personal experience. intelligence

Another way in which we can know God is through our own personal experiences, through our perseption of the Universe, of nature, of the world around us. I think it is probably true that, to see God through these things requires openness to faith as a prerequisite. Jesus told us to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength." Some theologians have called this approach to theology, "Natural theology." Process theologians also put emphasis on the intellect and personal experience, and reflection on that experience. Some churches have chosen to lift up these sources of knowledge of God as the ultimate and most reliable sources (to some degreee this is true of the Quakers, the Anabaptists, and the Unitarians). Sometimes, as with the Quakers, personal experience, and the Holy Spirit are linked very closely together.

On the other hand, some churches have chosen to disregard personal experiences as unreliable or unimportant. I think that these factors are important, but that without the other correctives (scripture, Spirit, Church tradition and history) they may be hard to sort out and understand.

I know that God is present to me in the world of nature, and in the incredible expanses of the Universe. But I also know that one has to have a certain prior level of awareness to appreciate that. It was Elizabeth Barrett Browning who said: "Every bush is afire with God, but only he who sees takes off his shoes. The rest sit around and pluck blackberries." Many of us are so out of touch with both inner and outer mysteries, that the world holds no *wonder*, no awe for us.

I also know that God has touched me personally, many times in my life. And any such experience is "self-authenticating" in that only I know, fully, what it means to me. The testimony, love and concern of many people has profoundly influenced my life and my faith.

When I cam out as a gay

person, I felt free for the first time in my life. I felt that God was with me, and God affirmed and delighted in my freedom — which was a freedom to be truthful, to love, and to express that love with my heart and mind and soul and body which God had given me. Coming out was a gift. But to any individual, self-authenticating experience such as that needs to go one step further. Somehow, I had to be able to relate that to a community of people. I think the emergence of a community of gay Christians was the most dynamic thing that could have happened to me. I came together with people who were experiencing the same thing — we were coming out of our closets of shame and loneliness, and discovering each other. Paul Minear describes it very well: "The church was (is) most really the church when it experienced in dying the transition from existence as "no people" to existence as the "People of God."[15]

We have come from "no people" and are becoming the People of God. And that experience has been authoritative, *real*, for us. Lives have been changed. Miracles have happened, transformation and resurrection! We have emerged from hopelessness and lovelessness and have learned, together, how to hope and love. All this is happening as our people come to know the good news of God's love in a very personal way.

Back to one of the original questions: what do we do when two or more of these authoritative sources of knowledge of God conflict?

First of all, I think that God's will is *never* in conflict; but, as human beings, with human resources, *we* are often in conflict about God's will. It seems to me that nothing *basic* in scripture could be in conflict with the movement of the Spirit, the intention of the sacraments, the lessons of history, or authentic personal experience. Problems arise when we absolutize one of these, and refuse to see potential for human error and misunderstanding in each of these.

For instance, even though in a few isolated places, scripture clearly condemns homosexual behavior, scripture also affirms self-giving love. We can also see, even in terms of heterosexuality, that scripture does not provide us with a totally adequate understanding of sexuality. We know more today about sexuality than did the Biblical writers. We can see, in relationship to many issues, that Biblical writers often reflected the prejudices of their culture. Another corrective is that the Spirit is really moving in our church; and I think that we have enabled the awakening of such movement in other churches. Church tradition on this matter is being seriously questioned; and the history of the Chirch confirms our outrage and teaches us that we *can* be and become the church. Finally, our personal experiences have led us to believe that nothing so basic in us as our sexuality can be alien to God — in fact, that God loves us very much indeed.

We can apply the method of analysis to other issues, such as the role of women in the church, issues of racism, of violence and non-violence, of the relationship of the Church to the state. In terms of the women's issue, scripture is obviously predominantly patriarchal, and emerged from a patriarchal culture, and yet, scripture also gives us a vision of a non-patriarchal "Kingdom" of God, where, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female;" but where, "we are all one in Christ Jesus."

There is *no* one, final, earthly authority by which we can easily determine God's will. God alone is the final authority about God; and God is always revealed to us through human sources. As St Paul says, "Now we see only puzzling reflections in a mirror, but then we shall see face to face. My knowledge now is partial; then it will be whole, like God's knowledge of me." (1 Cor 13:12). Furthermore, if we believe that Christian authority must be a function of God's love, then it follows that it cannot imitate secular models. Authority in the Church must be shared, must be a matter of collegiality. It must not stoop to threats or use of force — whether physical, economic, political or social. There are times when strong leadership is necessary, when decisions must be made. But always these things must be done in love — and I don't mean to make that sound easy. Love has its own power — and it is the only power which does not tend towards corruption. All who are in authority must be accessible, and open to feedback from the people. No earthly authority can be absolutized. It is sad when those in authority believe that only force and control will enable the Church to survive or reach its goals. Nothing could be more self-defeating.

As the Body of Christ, we all bear the burden of authority. The final authority in the Church is the *whole Body of Christ insofar as it is open to the will of God.* Through earnest prayer, communication and accountability; through study of the scriptures, theology, ethics, church history and tradition, and the world around us, we will be able to proclaim the gospel to the whole world with the authority of God's love.

NOTES

1 Bainton, Roland, *Here I Stand, A Life of Martin Luther* (this book helped me to understand the relationship of the religious movements to the political changes).
2 Bryant, *The Bible's Authority Today*, p. 156.
3 McKenzie, *Authority in the Church*, p. 3.
4 Ibid. p. 23.
5 Ibid. p. 28.
6 Ibid. p. 69.
7 C. H. Dodd, *The Authority of the Bible*, p. 131.
8 C. F. Evans, "The Inspiration of the Bible," (*Interpreters' Bible*), p. 32.
9 C. H. Dodd, p. 18.
10 From a lecture in Old Testament Theology, given by Dr. Harrell Beck, Boston University School of Theology, Sept. 1972.
11 C. F. Evans, p. 31.
12 Barclay, *Promise of the Spirit*, p. 22.
13 McKenzie, p. 55.
14 Ibid. p. 53.
15 Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, p. 260.

OUR BROTHER MARTIN LUTHER KING

by JEFFREY PULLING

LAST JANUARY 15, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., would have been 47 years old. He was only 39 when he was killed. I would like for us in MCC to consider this man as an example for us: a champion for the liberation of oppressed people, a pioneer in using non-violence to achieve justice, a Christian minister, and a modern-day saint. King has been considered by some to be a skillful politician, a clever opportunist, an agitator for trouble, and a "dirty old man," but whatever you may think of him, he has had a profound effect on our world. He got the ball rolling. He brought the struggles of people to be free from oppression right into the forefront of American life, and things have not been the same since.

King did what he did because he felt called by God to act. If he had not responded to this call, it is open to question whether there would be any movement for Gay liberation today. If it had not been for King, MCC might not even exist. Why is this? I am not suggesting that King was a proponent of Gay rights, although with his sensitivity and ever-expanding vision he probably would have come to support our cause if he had lived. I am saying, however, that the Black civil rights movement which King led has stimulated all subsequent freedom struggles here in America. Moreover, King has been a personal inspiration for many.

The struggle for liberation among Blacks, which started to move in the '50s, included a push for equal rights as citizens and for an end to discrimination in employment and society. The Black civil rights movement really bombarded our whole society. We were forced to pay attention to it. Other racial minority groups woke up and wanted their rights. Spanish-speaking people and American Indians have begun to demand what is their's by right. Different age groups have decided that they want to be heard, namely young people and elderly people. Sex has also been getting into the act. Women are turning our society's norms and patterns upside down. Gay men, Lesbians, and other erotic minorities are demanding full acceptance into economic, social, political, and religious arenas and an end to harassment.

We owe Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a huge debt for stimulating all of this. We are also indebted to him for many of the tactics and strategies we now use as we press for liberation. Following the pattern he set up, we are still trying to ensure the civil rights of all American people through passing laws and through the legal-judicial process. We still rely on non-violent demonstrations to make our point known, using rallies, marches, civil disobedience, fasts, etc. King did not invent these methods and strategies, to be sure, but he showed that they could be successful in the United States.

GOD HAS IMPLANTED A VISION IN OUR CHURCH OF AN INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY OF ALL TYPES OF PEOPLE...

We owe King another debt. More than any other contemporary figure, he linked the Christian faith with all of this. He reminded us that the work of the Church *is* the work of liberation, the drive toward justice and freedom. All of these struggles for liberation going on today are exactly what should be going on. This is what God wants to be happening. We should be joining in rather than standing to the side or worse, standing in the way. King reminded us of this, and I will always remember him for that. King called Christians back to the Biblical vision of deliverance, justice, and wholeness. One of King's favorite passages from Scripture was from the Book of the prophet Amos (5:21-24). Amos said that God despises the show and pretence of many religious feasts, assemblies, offerings and songs. What God wants to see is "a mighty flood of justice — a torrent of doing good" *(Jerusalem Bible)* or (as the *Revised Standard Version* puts it) "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Amos and several of the other Old Testament prophets spoke out repeatedly for an end to oppression and for recognizing the reign of God's justice *(Isaiah 1:16-17; Micha 6:6-8; Jeremiah 7:1-11; etc.)*. Trito-Isaiah said that the Lord does not want the people to

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perform rituals and to fast while they keep on oppressing or neglecting their neighbors. The fast that God wants from them is for them to break the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, to smash every yoke, to share their bread with the hungry, to take the homeless poor into their own homes, to clothe the persons they see to be naked, and to not hide from their relatives who need help *(Isaiah 58)*.

Jesus himself, who was the very embodiment of God speaking and acting in our world, quoted another passage from Trito-Isaiah to describe his own ministry *(Isaiah 61:1-2 = Luke 4:16-19)*. Jesus saw his ministry to be this: to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives, to proclaim new sight for the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, and to announce that this was the time when God was ready to act and to give blessings. Jesus knew he would be killed if he carried out such a ministry, and so he was (just as King knew he would be cut down if he continued in his work). Jesus gathered around him a group of disciples and he trained them. He told them to go out and tell others about himself *and* to carry on his work. Jesus Christ tells us, his followers in this day, to do these same things.

King was a servant of God, and he called his fellow Blacks and all White persons of good will to likewise become servants of God. King saw the work of liberation as being the work of the Church. When there was a vacuum in the leadership of the emerging Black civil rights movement, he stepped forward. I look upon him as a saint, that is one set apart by God, one dedicated to God, and one used by God. I would like to suggest to all MCC churches that they celebrate King's birthday this January. Many of our churches have been doing this for a number of years. I suggest this not because it is a good White liberal thing to do or because it is a way to attract Blacks into our churches. Rather I suggest it for the sake of King himself and what he means to us. I think we all should set aside a time to thank God for the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr. By his dedicated work and heroic example, King helped the rest of us to see what God wants happening in our world.

Remembering King on one day a year, however, is not enough. God has implanted a vision in our church and in each one of us individually. This vision is of an inclusive community of all types of people: Black, White, Gay, heterosexual, female, male, old, young, poor, wealthy, and everything in between. In the community of our vision, everyone would be in communion with God and with each other. Everyone would be giving of themselves *and* receiving what others had to give to them. This is the vision of the shalom-community which ancient Israel had and which the early Church had. This is the vision that inspires us today and keeps us working. Every time we build or accomplish anything that approximates this vision we show other people what God's will is, we are pointing ahead to the time when this vision will become a reality when God's reign is fully established and recognized.

There are several things standing in the way of our realizing this vision. There are several factors within our church and outside of our church that are hindering us and holding us back. I will not enumerate all the feelings and attitudes that block our vision, but I do want to stress that we have to start to get along with each other and to stop putting each other down. It is very unfortunate that we minorities often fight each other, and it is unproductive too. Every group, whether it be Blacks, Spanish-speaking people, Lesbians, feminists, Gay men, or whatever, has their own particular struggles to win and their own priorities. It seems to me, however, that racism, sexism, and homophobia are related.

MCC must press for the liberation of all people and groups, for their cause is our cause. We must be sure not to oppress other persons in our actions and inaction. I still see a lot of racism and sexism at work in MCC. We must be rid of them! It is no accident that only a few MCC churches have more than one or two Blacks in the congregation. It is no accident that in a majority of our churches still, women do not participate as fully as men. The inclusive community that we envision for ourselves will not come about by our dreaming about it and talking about it. We must be willing to commit our lives and our resources to do this work of God.

THE GAY CHRISTIAN

A journal of theological reflection from Metropolitan Community Church

THE GAY CHRISTIAN is the theological journal of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. Individual articles reflect the thoughts and opinions of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the doctrinal position or official policy of the UFMCC.

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Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

THE CELLMATE

April/May 1976

Norm Flowers Joins National Prison Ministry Staff

Norm Flowers has resigned as Area Representative of the Board of Institutional Ministry in Chicago and has relocated in Los Angeles to assist at the national level of the prison Ministry of MCC.

Norm, who also coordinated the prison ministry effort in the Great Lakes District, received the call from the Board of Elders at their March meeting. He had been nominated by the Reverends Mickley, Bunce, and Gilbert who serve on the Board of Institutional Ministry. The recommendation was presented to the Elders by Rev. Elder Richard Vincent who is liaison Elder for this ministry. It was also necessary for Norm to make arrangements for his parole to be transferred to California and he has also requested a transfer of membership from Good Shepherd Parish/MCC Chicago to MCC of Los Angeles.

He will be filling a gap in the administrative work of the Board of Institutional Ministry, assisting on the 1976 edition of the *Prisoners Yellow Pages* and a new and revised edition of the *MCC Prison Ministry Handbook*, coordination of the pen pal program, and communication with Area Representatives.

In 1969 he graduated from Franklin Center High School, Franklin Grove, IL, with his major area of study in Agriculture and Business Administration. After high school, Norm worked on high line construction for nearly a year before entering the army as a draftee. In his basic training, Norm served as a Squad Leader and as Platoon Leader in Advanced Individual Training.

His experience and insights as a former inmate of the Illinois State Penitentiary system are valuable assets

Continued on next page

Pastor Heather Anderson Meets With Department of Corrections

The Rev. Heather Anderson, MCC Chaplain of Michigan State Prison at Jackson, met with Mr. Perry Johnson, State Director of Corrections, and the entire Board of Corrections on April 15, 1976.

The Rev. Nancy Wilson was with her. Nancy and Heather, copastors of MCC Detroit, obtained the appointment in order to request authorization to hold worship services at the Jackson institution.

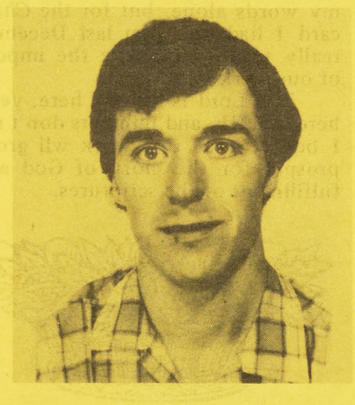
The request was not immediately granted. The Department politely heard Rev. Anderson and Rev. Wilson's presentation and explanation of MCC ministry.

"But we already have an interdenominational Protestant service," one official said.

"But homosexuals are openly condemned and made to feel unwelcome," answered Rev. Anderson. The MCC ministers went on to explain the uniqueness and centrality of the Holy Communion worship service in the Metropolitan Community Church.

The Director of Corrections indicated that the matter would be referred to the Attorney General of the State of Michigan and that there would be an answer by June.

Revs. Anderson and Wilson agreed that the attitude of the Department was not negative. They were informed that officials were impressed by their sincerity and credentials and by their work in the institution.



Norm Flowers

However, they learned that the real reasons for the delay and hesitation are two (not uncommon ones). 1) They feel they just don't know what it would mean to have 50 or 60 "homosexuals" in one place. [And it might be asked "what does that mean?"] 2) To recognize MCC ministry is somehow to acknowledge homosexuality and they don't know how to deal with this [politically complicated] factor: [And it seems no amount of explaining can change their misconceptions.]

Meanwhile Heather and sometimes Nancy, along with other volunteers, continue to visit the prisoners on a one to one basis once or twice a week. Brian McNaught, the national chairperson of Dignity's Social Action program, went with them before his recent move to Boston.

Chaplain Anderson has been informed by a reliable source that the warden of the Jackson prison is impressed by her work. Both Nancy and Heather have been recognized as Chap-lains and admitted to the inner counseling rooms of the institution. But some of the prison staff are still singling out the leaders of the "congregation" for harassment and special punishments.

A Detroit attorney is now preparing the necessary legal papers to file suit if a favorable decision is not obtained from the Attorney General and the Department of Corrections in June.

The Director of Corrections is aware of the favorable decision by a three judge federal Court in California which stated that MCC is a bonafide Church and denial of prisoners' requests for MCC worship services is a serious infringement of their constitutional rights. The Department is aware that a similar suit will be filed in Michigan in this identical situation. ●

FLOWERS ===

Continued from previous page

to the national outreach of MCC Prison Ministry.

Carl G. Lee is the new Area Representative for Chicago and Rev. Heather Anderson has been appointed as District Representative of the Board of Institutional Ministry in the Great Lakes District.

"Norm has outlined some good projects for Prison Ministry", said Rev. Mickley, National Administrator, "but right now he says he is striving to make the present program operate at its full potential. We observed the effective work Norm was doing and we are confident that the national prison ministry will benefit from his enthusiasm, talent, and dedication to the Lord's work. We are pleased that he has come to Los Angeles to work closely with the Board. Many projects of the Board have been moving slowly. I'm sure we'll see progress now." ●

Christian Social Action: Prison Ministry

MCC has from the beginning been interested and involved in Prison Ministry. Since 1972 there has been a national prison ministry established by the General Conference.

"Prison Ministry is clearly a Christian social action mandated by Scripture," said the Rev. Bud Bunce, National Chief of Chaplains. He serves on the Board of Institutional Ministry along with Rev. Joseph Gilbert, National Advisor and Rev. Richard Mickley, National Administrator. Rev. Elder Richard Vincent is the Elder appointed as liaison with the Board of Elders.

Along with the National Council of Churches, "MCC will continue to be committed to working for change in the criminal justice system and to finding ways to join with others in common efforts in this critical area of our national life. We feel the membership of MCC in the Interreligious Task Force on Criminal Justice of the Joint Strategy and Action Committee (JSAC) is very important to our Christian social action mission and is complementary to our direct ministry of word and sacrament to the women and men in the state and federal prisons of America," said Rev. Mickley. ●

I AM THEIR CHAPLAIN

by Rev. Tere Ann Roderick

There is a small group of men sitting in the Protestant Chapel at 2:00 p.m. on a Monday afternoon. Of those few people, several are not even aware of the special outreach of MCC to gay people. They are not gay, and they really don't know why they are here, except that they wandered in once before and came face to face with a loving God.

The place is the Correctional Medical Facility, Vacaville, California, during the MCC service.

How do I know about their feelings? I am their MCC chaplain. Time and time again, I have heard strangers who wandered in state that this service meant more to them than any other they had attended. Time after time, I see the "straight" men return to sit among the gay brothers they once mocked. I don't try to understand it. This is between them and God, but I know it is *real.*

Yes, real. It is real, in that they are hearing acceptance from God, for that is what we try to preach. Real, in that they see the love the MCC group has, one for the other. Real, in that they are welcome, no matter who they are, no matter what they are, no matter where they have been. This is the Christ message unspoken, the one the men of Vacaville *show* rather than talk about.

We are few in number, and not the same faces each week. One week some people might get out of work to drop in, then the next service be unable to attend. It really doesn't matter. They are with us in spirit always.

It never ceases to amaze me that whether our regulars are with us or not, we still seem to have the same number in attendance.

Even more amazing to me, is the scope of the ministry we share at CMF. Last week, a brother I had never seen came to service. After the service, he came over to me to thank me, not for my words alone, but for the *Christmas* card I had sent him last December. It really made me realize the importance of our work here.

The Lord is moving here, yes, even here in CMF, and numbers don't matter. I believe that this work wll grow and prosper for the glory of God and the fulfillment of the scriptures. ●

S-1 MUST DIE!

NO COMPROMISE

In its present form S-1 cannot pass because of public opposition, but some Senators are still pushing for compromise that would keep 90% of it.

The massive rewrite of the U.S. Criminal Code by the Nixon - Mitchell Justice Department has repression of freedom hidden on every one of its 700 pages.

It must die. Compromise will not erase the total disregard for civil liberties displayed in this longest single piece of legislation which the Congress has ever faced.

The Board of Elders in its March meeting in Denver passed a resolution urging the districts and member churches of the Universal Fellowship to oppose this repressive bill. ●

Warden's Forum Endorses MCC

In a letter to Mr. Perry Johnson, Director of the Michigan Department of Corrections, the Chairperson of the Jackson Prison Warden's Forum has reported the findings of that group.

"The Forum members read and studied the UFMCC material made available to them. It is the general consensus that this religious group is honest and sincere. They are God fearing people who are concerned about providing Christian fellowship for both gays and non-gays. This group is interested in bridging the gap in all Christian areas, especially here in prison since it is vitally important for people in this place to find meaningful directives in their lives." ●

POETRY

the wisdom of God's plan

It's sometimes very difficult for us to understand
The wisdom and the love behind the things that God has planned

But we wouldn't have the rainbow if we didn't have the rain
We wouldn't know of pleasure if we'd never tasted pain

We wouldn't love the sunrise if we hadn't felt the night
And we wouldn't know of weakness if we hadn't sensed God's might

So God's given us a balance --
Enough joys to keep us glad
Enough tears to keep us humble
Enough good to balance bad

And if you'll trust in God
you'll see --
Though yesterday brought sorrow
The clouds will part and dawn will bring a better tomorrow

Mike Turpin
Arizona State Prison

RICHARD PAYNE FINISHING TIME AT LOMPOC PRISON

Richard Payne, a friend and correspondent of many in MCC has been transferred to the prison in Lompoc, CA, to serve the last four months of his time.

"I read about Samaratian Bible School in the January *In Unity*. Is there a chance I could attend? I sure hope things will be different this time. I have grown a lot. I think now I can face my problems instead of running from them. I send my love to all my friends in MCC."

"My release date is not until September 11, not August 1, as I was originally told. So, there goes General Conference for me. But there will be next year, won't there?"

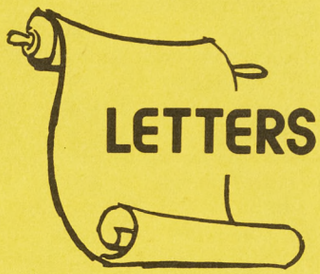
"I am working in nursing here and learning quite a bit. I have to be in the closet here, but I would like to hear from my friends."

Richard Payne
36396 - 115
P.O.B. W
Lompoc, CA 93436

TERRY McLAIN THANKS HIS FRIENDS

I do want you to know I appreciate the many prayers that have been said for me. I am glad to report I have another chance to see the parole board soon. I don't know what I would have done with Jim Lewey's help. Thanks to him and what he said in my behalf to the parole board, I will have a new start. Thank you, MCC. I won't let you down if given the chance to come be with you.

Terry McLain
Menard, IL



■ It is great to be on the streets again. I am now attending MCC Los Angeles and working in Beverly Hills. I enjoyed being a part of MCC at Atascadero and appreciate the friendship of all my friends there.

Dan Jentzen
P.O. Box 1900
Santa Monica, Ca 90405

■ I have just transferred from California Medical Facility at Vacaville to California Men's Colony at San Luis Obispo.

At Vacaville it was my pleasure to share in the love of Jesus Christ under our very inspiring and devoted chaplain, Rev. Tere Ann Roderick.

At Vacaville I had the pleasure of directing the congregation in song. I remember well wonderful Willie Smith. Please give him my love in Christ, and also Revs. James Sandmire, June Norris, and Troy Perry, whom I have known since 1968.

In closing I want to express my gratitude to Rev. Roderick who is helping so many in the prison ministry. I pray the Lord will continue to bless her and the work she does.

Jack Lee Norman

Area Representatives

CARL LEE

Carl Lee is continuing the work begun by Norm Flowers in Chicago in behalf of prisoners and ex-prisoners.

Pen Pal classes, begun by Norm were continued by Carl and the group decided to continue meeting monthly to discuss problems and hear speakers that would help them with their ministry.

The Chicago prison ministry team is now working with more than fifty prisoners and ex-offenders. ✱

SHELDON HAIGHT

Sheldon Haight, Area Representative of the Board of Institutional Ministry in Seattle, WA, reports writing nearly fifty letters a month and making several visits to the Washington State Reformatory.

He writes that he was particularly pleased because "one of the guys I corresponded with recently made a trip to Seattle to personally thank me for writing to him while he was in prison. That was cool since many of the guys are never heard from again unless there are difficulties."

Sheldon reports, gleefully, that he himself has been dismissed from state probation and is now a free citizen.

He has run into some prejudice from the administration of McNeil Island Federal Penitentiary in Steilacoom, WA, where they "strongly disapprove of these faggot church services."

Sheldon, a deacon at MCC Seattle, is one of the longest-serving MCC members in the national prison ministry programs. In Seattle he and Rev. Warren Wagner collaborate on many projects in service to the many prisoners who have turned to them. ✱

BOB ARTHUR

The Rev. Bob Arthur, Pastor of MCC Omaha, and Area Representative in that area, continues his regular visits to prisoners, as well as counseling prisoners released.

Bob was saddened recently by the return to prison, for a violation of parole rules, of one of his counselees.

He still maintains a steady stream of letters back and forth from prisoners. His correspondence load is increasing because his correspondents are getting their friends to write him also. He preached on Prison Ministry at the Omaha Church recently and several church members volunteered to be pen pals. ✱

TERRY NAPIER

Terry Lee Napier, Area Representative in Cincinnati, has been visiting prisoners in the Labanon Correctional Institution near Cincinnati every Saturday and every other Tuesday.

Terry and John Good are also corresponding with about 20 prisoners in other institutions. ✽

STEVEN QUESNEL

Steven Quesnel of MCC Albuquerque, NM, has been corresponding with Mike Turpin in the Arizona State Prison. Mike is appearing before the parole board soon and asks prayers for patience.

Steven sent a collection of Mike's poems for consideration for future issues of Cellmate. ✽

NICK CUPO

Nick Cupo, Area Representative in Philadelphia, reports that three MCC Philadelphia people are working as volunteers with the Department of Probation. They are working on a one to one basis with probationers assigned to them regardless of their affectional orientation.

Two additional volunteers who are trained tutors in basic reading and writing skills are also giving their time and skills.

In addition two MCC people are working with Volunteers in Prison in various capacities, such as caseworker aides, tutors, counselors.

Two MCC members are trained Thresholds Counselors. Thresholds is a program that teaches decision-making to prisoners who are about to be released or paroled. Nick Cupo has been asked by state authorities to draw up a proposal to bring Thresholds into the state prisons.

Seven pen pals are writing prisoners on their mailing list.

Nick Cupo, a member of the Governor's Task Force on Criminal Justice, has been counseling a prisoner at the state prison who appears to be receiving unjust and unfair treatment. He has referred the matter to the Task Force which now is studying the matter.

PRISON MINISTRY TO WOMEN

By Dee Jackson, MCC New York

It took six months of visiting rehabilitation centers, dealing with ex-offenders, and meeting and briefing their Directors on what MCC is and our purpose in the community before a dream finally became a reality.

The constant refusals from the administrative staff were disappointing for three of those months. When I made my first visit behind the walls of Rikers Island Facility for Women, I was only allowed to see Bobbi Sanchez, and only because she is a member of MCC. I was invited to lunch with the staff there and was given a chance to discuss our program with the superintendent. I was asked to participate on a panel the inmates had prepared on homosexuality.

As a result of this meeting, women began to express their desire to be counselled. Letters arrived at our office every week asking for me to visit.

Some women were able to discuss their sexuality openly, and we always ended in prayer. They were deeply moved and demanded more time and religious services. This behavior became so threatening and overwhelming for the staff that I was limited to visiting only Bobbi.

There are many gay professionals working in the system who have helped us gain access to the facility. There are other avenues opening up. It's been hard work, but my greatest support has been the many prayers for this ministry.

MCC NEW YORK GOES INTO THE JAILS

Jail ministry is the theme of the highly impressive March issue of the MCC New York *Mustard Seed*.

Rev. Jay Neely tells about his ministry to the men at Rikers Island, the detention center of the New York City Department of Corrections.

Dee Jackson tells of her ministry and the administrative stumbling blocks to her ministry to the women's division at Rikers Island.

Bobbi Sanchez tells it like it is from inside Rikers Island.

Bill Smith skillfully summarizes the national prison ministry of the Universal Fellowship.

All in all, an impressive testimony of what one congregation is doing "for the least of these." ●

PRISON MINISTRY TO MEN

By Rev. Jay Neely, MCC New York

It was over two years ago at District Conference in Providence that the congregations of the Northeast District made a commitment to do programs for prison outreach to the men and women of the gay community. A year ago, MCC/NY began plans for a prison outreach. Those plans became a reality on the second Sunday of November, 1975, when the first Fellowship service was conducted in the Day Room of the "Queen's Tank" at Rikers Island.

Rikers Island is a detention center for the New York City Department of Corrections. Like most penal institutions, it is crowded, understaffed and strife-ridden. There are three main detention areas: for men, women, and adolescents. In the men's facility, the "homo" is segregated for the purpose of protective custody; this is not necessary in the women's facility. If being in prison is dehumanizing, being in prison and gay is the lowest rung on the ladder. The male gay inmate is the object of ridicule, abuse, exploitation and neglect.

There are many in the Department of Corrections who can discern the special problem of the gay inmate; some are so deeply imbedded with prejudices that they probably can never be changed. For most, there is an intense need for education. Our mission to Rikers Island has not only enabled us to bring the message of love and salvation to our incarcerated gay brothers and sisters, to share and to give as we are commanded by Christ; it has also enabled us to carry out a low profile educational process. For our "gay Christians" are the "queerest" bunch!

Our work has just begun. It is a big project. It is a great need. The volunteer response has been unlike any other project we have undertaken. The commitment of all involved is deeply spiritual. We conduct services in the main chapel now. As we gather there, the atmosphere is just like any MCC. We join hands with out new gay friends at the conclusion of the service and sing with real conviction "blessed be the tie that binds."